

Illinois



Department of Conservation
life and land together

LINCOLN TOWER PLAZA • 524 SOUTH SECOND STREET • SPRINGFIELD 62706
CHICAGO OFFICE - ROOM 100, 160 NO. LASALLE 60601
David Kenney, Director • James C. Helfrich, Assistant Director

December 20, 1983

Site: Malden Towers

Date: December 8, 1983

Mayor Harold Washington
City Hall
121 N. LaSalle St.
Chicago, IL 60602

Dear Mayor Washington:

This letter is to notify you that the place named above was entered in the National Register of Historic Places on the date listed above.

If you have any questions concerning this, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Keith A. Sculle
National Register Coordinator

KAS/nr

Illinois



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CHICAGO OFFICE - ROOM 100, 160 NO. LASALLE 60601

David Kenney, Director • James C. Helfrich, Assistant Director

December 20, 1983

Site: Malden Towers

Date: December 8, 1983

William McLenahan
Executive Director
Commission on Chicago Historical & Architectural Landmarks
320 North Clark/Room 516
Chicago, IL 60602

Dear Mr. McLenahan:

This letter is to notify you that the place named above was entered in the National Register of Historic Places on the date listed above.

If you have any questions concerning this, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Keith A. Sculle
National Register Coordinator

KAS/nr

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Malden Towers

and/or common

2. Location

street & number 4521 North Malden Street not for publication

city, town Chicago vicinity of

state Illinois code 12 county Cook code 031

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
☐ district	☐ public	☒ occupied	☐ agriculture	☐ museum
☒ building(s)	☒ private	☐ unoccupied	☐ commercial	☐ park
☐ structure	☐ both	☐ work in progress	☐ educational	☒ private residence
☐ site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	☐ entertainment	☐ religious
☐ object	☐ in process	☒ yes: restricted	☐ government	☐ scientific
	☐ being considered	☐ yes: unrestricted	☐ industrial	☐ transportation
		☐ no	☐ military	☐ other:

4. Owner of Property

name Bank of Ravenswood - Trust No. 25-4040

street & number 1825 West Lawrence Avenue

city, town Chicago vicinity of state Illinois

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Cook County Recorder's Office

street & number 118 North Clark Street

city, town Chicago state Illinois

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☐ no

date _____ ☐ federal ☐ state ☐ county ☐ local

depository for survey records

city, town _____ state _____

7. Description

Condition

☐ excellent
☒ good
☐ fair

☐ deteriorated
☐ ruins
☐ unexposed

Check one

☐ unaltered
☒ altered

Check one

☒ original site
☐ moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Malden Towers apartment building is a six-story common-corridor apartment building with a large seventh-story penthouse. The facade and most of the lateral elevations are finished in light tan pressed brick and cream-colored terra cotta, with polygonal turrets at the upper front corners.

The building is sited at the rear of a city lot about 50 by 143 feet, west front to the street. The main block is set back 8 feet from the north and south property lines. About 29 feet from the rear line the setbacks stop and the rear of the building occupies the full 50-foot width. In the front there are one-story wings 7 feet wide and about 39 feet deep forming part of the lobby, lounge, and office areas, which stand at grade and have 14-foot ceilings. Behind this, the center and rear portions are raised over a basement containing service areas.

Above the six-floor block there is a flat roof and upon this roof stands a large one-story bungalow or penthouse structure roughly 25 by 95 in plan. This bungalow is finished in stucco and has a flat roof with Spanish tile overhangs.

The facade divides into base, shaft, and capital, and is strictly symmetrical. Turrets and parapets, and the use of decorative motifs such as swords and shields, crossed fasces, and floral designs are evidently intended to give a medieval flavor.

The base is in cream terra cotta, laid up as random ashlar, with polychromatic ornament. The entrance is on center and consists of a large arched portal bordered with a floral design. Flanking it are two smaller arched openings for the lobby and lounge windows, which are French doors with wrought-iron grilles. Similar arches appear in the one-story wings. Between the wings and the main block the corners of the facade angle back at 45 degrees and similar but still smaller arched windows appear in the angles. The fan light over the doors has a simple geometrical pattern. The original doors have been lost, as have two bronze lanterns which originally flanked the entrance. The base is strongly terminated by a pointed-arch molding running across the entire facade.

The facade of the shaft is brick with terra-cotta trim. It is divided into three bays and the central bay is emphasized by joining the 3rd, 4th, and 5th floor windows with terra cotta, and placing a terra-cotta balcony at the 3rd. The corners angle back at 45 degrees and are likewise emphasized by terra-cotta trim. The windows of the second floor are trimmed in terra cotta so as to give a horizontal movement which causes this floor to act as a transition between the base and the shaft. The one-story wings are joined to the shaft by terra-cotta ailerons, which lead to platforms supporting seated chimeras (the chimera on the north wing has been lost).

(Continued on Continuation Sheet #1)

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only
received
date entered

Continuation sheet

#1

Item number 7

Page

A string course separates the shaft from the upper zone of the facade, consisting of the sixth floor and a high parapet. The central window here is a projecting oriel with two narrow casements, while the side windows are double-hung sash with simple trim. The angles carry octagonal turrets which overhang the angles of the lower floors and project slightly above the parapet. Originally these turrets had steep pyramidal roofs but these are now gone. The parapet is horizontal over the side bays but in the center bay forms a triangular gable with a small blind window. Two slender engaged tourelles flank this gable.

Similar gables are found on the lateral elevations about 20 feet back from the facade, and terra-cotta trim is again used to draw the windows of these bays into a vertical movement. Another such gable was originally found further back on the sides, but for some reason these rear gables were removed. For the most part the lateral elevations are finished with the same pressed brick and terra cotta as the front, but less elaborately. The parapet is battlemented between the gables. Where the rear gables were removed, these crenellations were not introduced, but the parapet was finished smoothly in the same brick and terra cotta.

The wide rear block is done in common brick and exposes the concrete-slab structure. The only feature here is a pair of balconies for the rear sixth-floor apartments, with little tile overhangs and iron grilles. The sixth floor is set back two feet from the alley to accommodate these balconies.

The rooftop bungalow was originally conceived as a 4-bedroom luxury apartment, but was redesigned to hold five hotel rooms. The front room gave onto a rooftop patio surfaced in quarry tile. The roofs of the one-story wings also were intended as terraces and were paved with quarry tile. These areas of the roofs have now been covered with asphalt or tar.

The high parapet corresponds to a crawl space above the sixth floor which gives access to mechanical and electrical systems.

Planning of the apartments was similar from floor to floor but no two apartments on the same floor are alike. In fact the common corridor is off center; the tenant space is about 16 feet wide on the south side of the corridor and 11 on the north.

Originally the front of the main floor was a grand lobby and lounge with a Spanish flavor. The ceilings had plaster beams. There was a large fireplace and doors had small openings filled with obscure glass and protected by wrought-iron grilles. Insensitive remodelings have spoiled the character of this space, but much of the original work appears to be in place and may be recoverable.

The brick fence in front of the building is a later addition.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
☐ prehistoric	☐ archeology-prehistoric	☐ community planning	☐ landscape architecture	☐ religion
☐ 1400-1499	☐ archeology-historic	☐ conservation	☐ law	☐ science
☐ 1500-1599	☐ agriculture	☐ economics	☐ literature	☐ sculpture
☐ 1600-1699	☒ architecture	☐ education	☐ military	☐ social/
☐ 1700-1799	☐ art	☐ engineering	☐ music	☐ humanitarian
☐ 1800-1899	☐ commerce	☐ exploration/settlement	☐ philosophy	☐ theater
☒ 1900-	☐ communications	☐ industry	☐ politics/government	☐ transportation
		☐ invention		☐ other (specify)

Specific dates 1928-29

Builder/Architect N. Ronneberg, Inc.

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

In a Chicago neighborhood rich in fine apartment buildings, the Malden Towers stands out as exceptionally ambitious and distinctive. Its imaginative castle-like design, its lavish use of fine materials on the sides as well as the front, and its unusual decorative vocabulary give it a striking presence, and it epitomizes the craftsmanship and optimism of the 1920s.

The Sheridan Park section of Chicago's Uptown, like many outlying city neighborhoods, underwent several waves of successively more intense development between 1891, the date of subdivision, and 1929, when the greatest building boom came to a halt. The large suburban homes of the 1890s were followed by six-flats around 1905-1910 and then by larger and larger buildings containing smaller and smaller apartments.

The last step in this progression is the "common-corridor" building, which attempts to maximize land use by improving an interior lot, typically 50 feet wide, with an apartment hotel covering as much of the land as possible; small dwelling units are placed along a common corridor running from front to back.

A recent study identifies 77 Uptown buildings of this type, although not all characteristics are always present. Of all these buildings, the one with the most distinctive appearance may well be the Malden Towers.

The six- or seven-story height is not unusual, but in the Malden Towers special care was given to proportion. Instead of using the full 50-foot frontage, the architect narrowed the facade to only two-thirds of the available dimension, apparently to emphasize the vertical.

The use of fine brick and terra cotta for the lateral elevations is unique for this class of buildings. The use of exposed concrete slab and common-brick infill, widespread at the time, is here confined to the rear 30 feet.

Finally, the building displays an unusual decorative style. Most of the buildings of this type fall into a narrow range of ornamental styles and one sees repeatedly the same red brick and the same classically inspired ornamental vocabulary. The "medieval Spanish" flavor here provides a welcome contrast, with the projecting turrets and battlemented parapets, and the use of polychrome terra cotta for decorative elements representing swords and shields, fasces, and floral motifs.

The Malden Towers was announced in the Chicago Sunday Tribune of October 14, 1928, and the reporter was enthusiastic. It was open and renting in the late summer of 1929.

(Continued on Continuation Sheet #2)

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

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Continuation sheet #2

Item number 8

Page

The building was designed by N. T. Ronneberg, a Norwegian-American engineer (1876-1939) who came to the U.S. in 1898. Settling in Chicago, he established a reputation as an engineer for industrial buildings, and then in 1928 opened his own architectural firm intending to specialize in large apartment buildings. He apparently built about a dozen before the Depression brought construction to a halt.

The building seems to have been a financial success in spite of the Depression, always well rented, and sometimes attracting celebrities. According to local tradition, Bob Hope, the entertainer, maintained an apartment there for many years.

To publicize the building it was given dramatic night lighting (described in Ronneberg's article in the Norwegian-American Technical Journal) and thus was literally a landmark of the North Side. The views from the rooftop bungalow are panoramic.

The Malden Towers has been altered only slightly over the years and retains its unique character. Its brick and terra cotta exteriors are in excellent condition.

This "medieval Spanish" tower, designed by a Norwegian-born engineer, built at a time of frenzied overbuilding, rich in materials, generous in its use of space, and unique in design and detail, is a monument to the great eclectic period of the twenties, one of the most distinctive buildings of its kind, and irreplaceable today.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet #3.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 0.16

Quadrangle name _____

Quadrangle scale _____

UTM References

A

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Zone Easting Northing

B

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Zone Easting Northing

C

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D

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G

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H

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Verbal boundary description and justification

See Continuation Sheet #3.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	(does not apply)	code	county	code
-------	------------------	------	--------	------

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Martin C. Tangora

organization _____ date July 21, 1983

street & number 4636 North Magnolia Avenue telephone (312) 878-7118

city or town Chicago state Illinois

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

____ national ____ state ____ local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature _____

title _____ date _____

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

_____ date _____

Keeper of the National Register

Attest: _____ date _____

Chief of Registration _____

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

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Continuation sheet

#3

Item number 9 and 10

Page

Item No. 9: Major bibliographical references

- Original plans and drawings (owner's possession)
- Norwegian-American Technical Journal, vol. 3 No. 1, February 1930 (owner's possession). Articles about Malden Towers (several illustrations) and about N. T. Ronneberg.
- Kenneth Bjork, Saga in steel and concrete, Northfield, Minnesota, 1947, pp. 368-9: Narrative of Ronneberg's career.
- The common-corridor building. Uptown Chicago Commission, 1983 (135 pp.). Opp. p. 21 is a map showing the location of 77 such buildings in Uptown.
- Ancient permit files, City of Chicago, Dept. of Inspectional Services; esp. File No. 200093 for construction of Malden Towers.
- Homer Hoyt, One hundred years of land values in Chicago. Univ. of Chicago, 1933. On successive waves of development of Chicago neighborhoods.

Item No. 1): Legal description of property

Lot 113 in Sheridan Drive Subdivision, being a subdivision of the north 3/4 of the east 1/2 of the northwest 1/4 of Section 17-40-14 together with that part of the west 1/2 of said northwest 1/4 which lies north of the south 800 feet thereof and east of the Green Bay Road.

